

New York Went to His Head. Will the Old Home Town Hold His Heart?

WHEN Jimmy Blair got out of the army, which was in the early spring of 1919, he spent one memorable day and one still more memorable evening in the city of New York. Then, dutifully and somewhat giddily, he boarded a morning train and started home for Carpenterville, five hours up-state.

Jimmy wanted to go home; that is, he had wanted to go home. He wanted to see his mother and father and Joe Hollis, the Denisons and all the rest. But, gosh! how he actually wished he could stay right on in the big town.

Jimmy knew exactly what had happened to him. He could even have put it into music.

In words, he had seen Virginia Van Westyn again for the first time in fifteen months, and Virginia, as he had admitted the fact to himself, had waited him cold. She had patted him straight between the eyes, had sent him to the ropes, had hog-tied him, put the Indian sign on him, sewed him up, knocked him for a goal—Virginia, who lived on the twelfth floor of a Park avenue apartment house, where the rents ran into five figures to the left of the good old decimal point.

Yet as Jimmy swung off the train at the dingy old station he was conscious of a funny lump that had risen into his throat. Then, before he could look around, he was engulfed by a wave of turbulent humanity, and all at once he was being kissed and thumped and slapped upon the back, while a machine-gun fire of questions was rebounding from his eardrums. "You old scout, you!" he heard. And then his mother was looking up into his eyes.

"Hello, ma!" he said, and hugged her tight. "Gosh! it's good to be back!"

"You're going to stay back now, aren't you, Jimmy? You won't go away again, will you, dear—ever in your life?"

"Same old goose!" said Jimmy Blair, and kissed his mother again. Then, "Why, Mary Denison?" he called over his mother's shoulder. "I thought you'd be all grown up. Well, I'll be darned! You look just about sixteen."

Jimmy's father laughed.

"Lot of changes since you been away, Jim."

But Jimmy wasn't listening. He had caught Mary Denison's hand and pulled her to him, bear fashion, and kissed her. And then he was patting her paternally on the back.

"You look great, Mary," he said. "Gosh! it's good to see everybody again!"

It never occurred to Jimmy that the paternal pat and the casual "everybody" had completely neutralized the kiss—and everything else.

Mary Denison didn't know Virginia Van Westyn's name, or whether Virginia was blonde or brunette, or tall or short, or French or English, or what not. But Mary did know instinctively that there was a Virginia and that she was a person to be puzzled.

Except for the fact that the "pat" was uniform, Jimmy Blair was puzzled by the feeling that he had never been away from Carpenterville at all. The place was exactly as he had expected it to be. That was the trouble. He felt let down.

He wondered pointedly what Virginia would think of it—the somewhat shabby streets and yellow and red "ramo" houses; the two-story business district, the golf course itself, only nine holes and very seedy; the one white marble building, the bank, at the corner of Park and Main; the two movie houses that smelled of peanuts; the black soot of the freight yards hanging over everything like a pall.

Jimmy pressed his lips together and shook his head. He would have to break it to his mother that he was going back to New York—going back just as soon as he decently could. After supper that evening, he reflected, would be the time.

Yet during the meal itself Jimmy felt himself weakening. His mother simply beamed. She had prepared scrumptious and the tomato bisque that Jimmy loved so well, and there was a peas steak, with baked potatoes and cauliflower, and a salad—and then lemon meringue pie.

Blair was going through the ceremony of cutting this delight when there came a knock at the door and Joe Hollis stormed in, with little Mary Denison on his arm, all wrapped in a soft brown elfin cloak that matched her hair and eyes.

"Can't leave you alone, you see," Joe proclaimed. "Mary said we ought to lay off you, but I dragged her along just the same."

"That's how we women fool you, Joe. As long as I'm coming to see you, why, I had to come to see him, that's all. That's the way girls are nowadays. They tell us very forward."

She let her brown eyes rest for an imperceptible second on Jimmy's face. But Jimmy Blair was laughing with-out concern, and his eyes were not on hers.

"Don't be a goose, Mary," he said. "Since when have we got so formal and everything?"

"You two sit down," Blair was insisting. "and try a bite of this pie. It's the first I've made in a long time—your favorite, Jim."

AFTER the last crumb of pie had disappeared and they were settling themselves comfortably in the old-fashioned living room rockers, Jimmy's father, lighting his cigar, asked what Jimmy, specifically, was going to do.

"Oh, you men!" broke in Jimmy's mother. "Why talk about jobs when Jim has so much to tell us?"

"Jobs," said her husband, jobs, peeling the band from his cigar, "jobs, mother, are sometimes quite important. Anyhow, I'd like to know, done any figuring, son?"

"Why, yes," and Jimmy shot a glance at his mother. "You see, dad, my major, a dandy chap, named Hed-hall—he's a partner in a big brokerage house down on the street—and he's got of thought."

"Street?" asked Mrs. Blair. "What street?"

"He means Wall street, mother," the boy's father explained.

"Oh, Jimmy! down in New York?"

"I'm afraid so, ma. But you see, the chances down there are wonderful, particularly in the social and business circles. I had the luck to establish

overseas. It's the chance of a life-time, really."

"But you were doing so well here, Jim."

"Not very well, ma, as doing goes. Twelve hundred a year is just a scratch compared to what I can make down there. Besides—"

"Twelve hundred a year is a mighty comfortable income," his mother protested. "What with this home and everything." She turned impatiently to young Hollis. "Can't you do anything with him, Joe?"

Joe Hollis laughed.

"It's a disease," he stated. "They've all got it."

"What do you mean?" Jimmy demanded. There was just an edge to his

ing hard in a mighty good office, and may be he might make a killing. And so, Jimmy Blair, for things were not going exactly as he had hoped they would.

For one thing, there was the job. It was a perfectly good job, and everybody told him he ought to be tickled to death with it, but somehow it seemed a little bit flat. Selling stocks and bonds!

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two thousand dollars left over after you've called in all the paper you have had out. Your mother will have that and the house. That's free and clear, you know. Except for a three-thousand-dollar first mortgage."

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"Of course," he said presently, "we can sell the house and I can take mother down to New York with me. I'd thought of that a little. Her voice trailed off uncertainly."

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"What do you mean?" asked the boy.

"From what I know of your mother, Jim, I don't think she'd want much to go to New York. Carpenterville's been her home for a good many years. It's well, it's about all she has left now. You're not old enough to understand that, maybe. But it's my opinion that taking your mother to New York—uprooting her right at this time—would just about end her."

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"Well, I'd listen to your Aunt Hat, Jim."

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"There's not a salary job in this town, Mr. Perry—none that I could get, anyway—that pays more than twenty-five dollars a week."

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"Yes," put in the man, "and spending most of it to keep up a front."

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He really didn't much care. Inside of him he felt like this: to be put up a fellow. He couldn't leave his mother now, he knew that. But how, how on earth, was he going to be able to give up Virginia?

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"Doesn't he?" asked Jimmy impatiently. "Doesn't he peddle the stuff from house to house. I think I remember him. I don't want to do that, Mr. Perry."

"There's a whole lot of things in life we don't want to do, Jim, particularly when we're responsible for somebody outside of ourselves."

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"Jed's got a good trade worked up, Jim, and he's willing to sell, I happen to know, for six hundred dollars, asking price. He'll take five. Now, here's what I'll do. Jim, I'll advance you the five hundred and I'll advance you the first payment on a flivver truck—and the rest is up to you. But I'll back you that much."

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creamery as a meeting place. Might as well let Virginia think the place was somehow his! Then abruptly he scowled.

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Resigning his job had been nothing. They did not seem surprised. They did not seem to care.

But saying good-bye to Virginia had been another story. He had told her that he couldn't afford a party, so—and it was mighty decent of her—and she had met him at the Waldorf and they had walked up 5th avenue together and then over to her home.

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